

Week 12 - March 23/24
Blessings and Cursings
Deuteronomy 28

TEACHERS: This is the last lesson of the Exodus Era. For those doing the daily reading, they would have read this passage on March 19

Life is based on choices. From the very beginning of time in the Creation Era, there has been the freedom to choose. God set it up that way since the time of Adam and Eve. The good thing and the bad thing about choices is that every choice has a consequence.

And just like choices, there are good consequences and bad consequences. In the Creation Era, Adam and Eve made a choice to eat from the tree that God had warned them about in the garden. It was the one and only parameter that God had given to them and they gave into temptation and made a choice to go against what God had told them. And the consequence was severe.

Also, in the Creation Era, Noah had a choice to make. He had to choose to believe in God that there would be rain, when at that time no one had ever seen rain. Noah made a choice to believe what God said and act accordingly building and Ark when everyone else was ignoring God.

In the Patriarch Era, Abraham made a choice to enter into a Covenant with God. The promise of God was to make the descendants of Abraham as numerous as the stars; in fact, they would be a great nation. At the time Abraham was an old man married to an old woman and they had not ever been able to conceive a child. But God eventually blessed them based on their choice. Abraham and Sarah gave birth to Isaac.

Because of Abraham's choice, God became known as The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

During the Exodus Era, Moses made choices. One choice was to kill an Egyptian while he was still Prince of Egypt and the consequence was for Moses to flee Egypt at the age of 40. For the next 40 years Moses lived in anonymity as a shepherd tending the sheep that belonged to his father-in-law. But at the age of 80, Moses once again had to make a choice when he saw a bush on a hillside burning without being consumed. Moses chose to turn, to look at this burning bush and then he heard the voice of God.

Moses made a choice to accept the call of God to lead the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt after 400 years.

Today as we finish up the Exodus Era, we are reminded that we have choices to make every day.

Our choices have consequences, most of which should come as no surprise. In fact, as the Israelites are getting closer to going into the land of promise they are going to have to make choices.

As free individuals who are part of a now free nation, the Israelites were going to have to consider that they had the responsibility that comes with freedom. The reality was setting in that there are specific consequences based on specific choices, both individually and as a nation.

It all comes down to making a choice. Let's look at how God sets it up for His people.

Deuteronomy 28: 1 “Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, that the LORD your God will set you high above all nations of the earth. ² And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, because you obey the voice of the LORD your God:” (*March 19th, Pg. 298*)

From the very beginning we see a promise and a condition:

The Promise: “Now it shall come to pass”

God is making a promise that it shall come to pass. At this point, with just those few words we don't know if what is coming to pass is going to be good or bad. We find out quickly what the potential is, but with those few words we simply know it is a promise. And then we come to the very next word that changes everything.

The Condition: If

Both in Hebrew, which is the language this was originally written and in English, this is called a “conditional clause”.

Conditional tenses are used to speculate about what could happen, what might have happened, and what we wish would happen. ---Education First (ef.com)

There have already been many occasions where God has spoken to His people telling them how to live, how to make choices, how to treat other people, how to spend their money, and how to use their resources.

God has been very clear with his expectations. God is also very clear about the promise of what “shall come to pass”.

Look at the last part of verse 1 for the promise: “...that the LORD your God will set you high above all nations of the earth.”

Remember where they are right now. The people of God, the Israelites, are still in the wilderness. A new generation has been born in the wilderness. This new generation has heard stories of their parents, grandparents, great grandparents and beyond; stories of bondage and slavery.

These people have never experienced what God is promising. They have only known two things: 1) slavery and 2) wilderness. Neither of which would constitute being set high above all

nations of the earth. In fact, all they had ever experienced was the complete opposite; being overshadowed, overthrown, and overwhelmed.

Now as they are on the cusp of the Promised Land, they hear these words of promise. It would be a new day for a new generation. They would be able to establish something their parents and grandparents never even dreamt of or experienced.

Did you notice *who* makes this happen? The LORD your God.

This would not happen because of their education level, financial status, trade skills or common sense. This would happen because the LORD their God, would make it happen. Jehovah, the one true God. Jehovah, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Jehovah, the God who used an 80-year-old shepherd named Moses to deliver His people out of Egypt.

The LORD their God would set them high above all nations of the earth.

This was a grand scale promise unlike any they had ever heard. Some had not even experienced Egypt because they were born in the wilderness. Some who had experienced Egypt had seen the power, economy, political system and influence of Egypt, but for 40 years had only seen the wilderness. But God was saying they would be high above all nations of the earth; not a region, not a mountain range, not limited by boundaries, but above all nations of the earth.

That is an incredible promise; that comes with a condition. We can't forget about the little two letter word, "IF".

Look again at Deuteronomy. 28: 1

Deuteronomy 28: 1 "Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, that the LORD your God will set you high above all nations of the earth. ² And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, because you obey the voice of the LORD your God." (*March 19th, Pg. 298*)

"IF you diligently obey." Let's pause there.

This is conditional. There is a cause and effect; a choice and a consequence. The people of God have always had a choice to make.

Anytime you see the word "if", that means the you have a choice. In this case, the first choice you have to make is whether or not to "diligently obey" the voice of the LORD your God.

The Hebrew word for "diligently obey" is actually the same Hebrew word used 2 times next to each other. It is the word "shawmah". In Hebrew it would read "shawmah shawmah". This means that you are to obey with great intentionality. There is nothing accidental about this kind of obedience.

It isn't like you happen to do the right thing without even thinking about it. The concept is to actually make an informed, intentional, deliberate decision to obey the voice of God. And the decision is not just a one-time decision, but it becomes a lifestyle of choices, hence the phrasing of "diligently obey;" it's a continuous action.

There are times in our lives where we happen to make the right choice because of circumstances beyond our control. I believe it is safe to say that most of us have gone the speed limit of 30 mph simply because the car in front of us is going 28 mph and it is a no passing zone with on-coming traffic; otherwise we would not be going 30 mph on the bumper of a car going 28 mph. But we are doing the right thing to avoid hitting the car in front of us.

In this passage it means looking at the various options, thinking through the various outcomes and making a deliberate decision to obey.

Now for us to have a chance to choose to obey the voice of God, we have to be able to hear the voice of God. I must admit I have never heard the audible voice of God. There are those in scripture who did. Moses heard the voice of God when at the burning bush as well as various times on Mt. Sinai.

The reality is most of us will never hear the audible voice of God, but that doesn't mean that God isn't speaking to us. In fact, I would submit to you we are able to hear the voice of God in greater detail than the Israelites in the wilderness were ever able to hear.

We have 66 books of the Bible that allow us to get to know God. In fact, we are in the midst of a 52-week study called "Know the Bible". One of the reasons we are doing this is to allow us to become more in tune with the "voice" of God through scripture.

In John 10:27, Jesus says, "My sheep know my voice, and I know them, and they follow me."

Hearing the voice of God is about relationship. In every Era we have studied thus far, God has wanted to have a relationship. In the Creation Era, God wanted a relationship with Adam and Eve, Cain, Able, Seth, and Noah. In the Patriarch Era, God wanted a relationship with Abraham and Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and Job. In the Exodus Era, God wanted a relationship with Moses, Aaron, Joshua, and all the Israelites.

God wants a relationship with you and me. It is through that relationship that we get to know the voice of our Shepherd.

Last week we studied in Deuteronomy 6 that we are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul and strength. Part of that kind of love from the inside out is knowing and hearing the voice of God.

But it goes beyond just hearing, we are to take it a step further in diligently obeying the voice of God. Putting into practice what we learn in classes like this. Putting into practice what we learn as we read scripture or hear a sermon. Putting into practice the guidelines and parameters that God lays out which are in place for our good and not harm; not to be restrictive but providing us with greater freedom.

God has put the ball in our court. The responsibility is ours because the choice is ours.

Look at verse 1 again.

Deuteronomy 28: 1 “Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, that the LORD your God will set you high above all nations of the earth. ² And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, because you obey the voice of the LORD your God.” (*March 19th, Pg. 298*)

IF...You...

1. Diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God, to
2. Observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today

Notice that God isn't trying to trick us. In fact, he makes it very clear and simple for all of us to understand. If you want to obey the voice of the LORD your God, you simply observe carefully all His commandments. No big deal.

Okay, maybe it is a big deal. Does that mean ALL His commandments? Can't it just be the commandments that I like? Or perhaps the commandments that are easy?

Remember that these people were in the wilderness having been set free from slavery and bondage for generations. They were in the process of developing a civilization as a new nation. God is the one who put into motion their freedom.

God had only their best interest in mind when He put forth these commandments which at times look harsh by 21st Century standards. But if you take the foundational 10 commandments there is nothing in there that is over the top or in place to do us harm. It is all about making us a people of relationships. Each one deals specifically with our vertical relationship with God or our horizontal relationship with others.

God did not want to dilute the power and significance of these commandments or anything that He has set forth in His word. All we must do is make a choice; to obey and observe. Thus, allowing His voice to speak to us through His word.

In choosing to obey and observe, God says there will be blessings. Look again at vs. 2

Deuteronomy 28: 2 And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, because you obey the voice of the LORD your God.” (*March 19th, Pg. 298*)

These blessings shall come upon you and over take you. It means that God will see to it that these blessing pursue us. Notice we are not pursuing the blessings. If we pursue the blessing than we are putting God in the backseat. We are neglecting our relationship with God. It is by pursuing a relationship with God that we hear His voice. And it is up to God to allow those blessing to pursue us and over take us.

Sometimes when something over takes you, it does so because you are not looking for it. It isn't in your line of view or focus. It happens in someone else's timeframe and not your own. So, it is with the blessings from God. Rarely do they happen on our time frame. They were never designed to happen on our time frame.

For the Israelites, their time frame would have been in the Promised Land in 2 weeks instead of 40 years. But in God's time frame, the Israelites had a lot of lessons to learn, a lot of mistakes to make, a lot of questions to ask and there needed to be time to give birth to a new generation.

Blessings are always on God's time frame and not our own. Many of the blessings God talks about take a significant amount of time, including generations. But we have to remember we serve an eternal God who brings about eternal blessings that we cannot always see or appreciate with our finite minds living in our temporary existence.

In the verses that follow (vs. 3-14), God lays out the blessings. And there are incredible blessings that truly impact every area of life. There are a lot of wonderful blessings from physical, to economic, to land mass, to financial, to spiritual.

And in vs. 9 we have another promise and condition that parallels vs. 1-2:

Deuteronomy 28: 9 "The LORD will establish you as a holy people to Himself, just as He has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of the LORD your God and walk in His ways. (*March 19, pg. 298*)

If you take time to read these first 14 verses, there are so many wonderful blessings. However, if you keep reading the rest of the chapter you will come to find out there are three times as many curses than there are blessings if they chose not to diligently obey the voice of God and obey His commandments.

God is serious about His relationship with us and He wants us to take it seriously as well.

Remember there is a reason these people are called the "children of God". There is a reason we are referred to as "sons and daughters of God". The scenario here is not unlike a parent and a child. "These material blessings were God's way of reminding His children that obedience brings blessing but disobedience brings chastening." (*Wiersbe Bible Commentary of the OT, pg. 361*)

It becomes depressing if you focus on the curses, especially since many of them are identical to the blessings. It is a picture of what "could have been."

We are not unlike the Israelites. We can make a choice today.

- Are we going to choose to diligently obey the voice of God?
- Are we going to observe His commandments?
- Are we going to be a Holy nation that stands on the Word of God?

The choice is ours, but so are the consequences.